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ABSTRACT

The study of teachers may well be a lens for fusing history of education's disparate perspectives, for teachers stand at the intersection of several of historiography's most dynamic currents. Teachers can be categorized as women, workers, professionals, citizens, and conveyers of values and ideas. Yet, until quite recently, teachers and their lives were absent from the writing of historians. This paper examines how and why several different waves of educational historiography have ignored the history of teachers. Ultimately, teachers as a subject of historical investigation were discovered at the crossroads of labor and women's history, but not before both perspectives were well established. Teacher unionism and teachers as a subject of feminist scholarship are discussed. Forty bibliographical references are included. (IAH)

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TEACHERS: LOST AT THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

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The study of teachers may well be a lens for fusing history of education's disparate perspectives, for teachers stand at the intersection of several of historiography's most dynamic currents. Teachers can be categorized as women, workers, professionals, citizens, and conveyers of values and ideas. Yet, until quite recently, teachers and their lives were absent from the writing of historians, no matter what their specialization. In his research on school enrollment patterns in Providence, Joel Perlmann noted that we have little sense of how even to frame our questions about school life because of our astonishing lack of information about teachers.[1] In this paper I will examine how and why several different waves of educational historiography have ignored the history of teachers.

LOST -- AND FOUND -- AT THE CROSSROADS

As the Sixties drew to a close, more than half a million American teachers, one out of every four elementary and secondary teachers, had engaged in work stoppages. By 1970, the politics of education had been substantially altered by the introduction of collective bargaining; teacher unionism had given organized labor a foothold in the white collar occupations it had targeted for membership growth; and the world's largest teacher union local had collided with the civil rights movement.[2]

Many publications discussed the startling emergence of teacher unionism, but historians of education, even those who defended their "presentist" concerns, paid it no serious attention for almost twenty-five years. The successive

reconceptualizations of educational history by "new historians," revisionists, and writers of social history, including historians of labor, women, and urbanization, ignored teachers and their organizations, though it was a topic germane to each of the new perspectives. How did this serial and collective historiographic myopia occur?

The change in teachers' lives as workers and educators was promptly noted by some educational journals. Phi Delta Kappan rushed to discuss its first manifestation, the 1960 teachers strike in New York City: Myron Lieberman described "The Battle for New York City Teachers" and R.J. Barstow asked "Which Way New York City--Which way the Professionals?"[3] Starting in 1963, the Teachers College Record carried at least one article a year about teacher unionism, prefacing a 1964 article with the note that teacher unionism was "one of the hottest issues before professional educators."[4] In 1965 the Record editors noted the heavy volume of mail received after an exchange between representatives of the two organizations contending for teachers' loyalty and dues, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA).[5]

As AFT's organizing victories increased pressure on NEA to change its philosophy and tactics, academic interest in teacher unionism increased. Dissertation Abstracts chronicled both phenomena. In 1964-65, only one dissertation was written on collective bargaining in education, but by 1966-67 the number had jumped to 14. Between 1967 and 1969, 48 dissertations, primarily

in political science and sociology, were listed under "Collective Bargaining -Teachers," covering developments in Alabama, California, Michigan, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Ohio, Kansas, Texas, Washington state, Utah, Connecticut, and Minnesota.[6]

Harvard Educational Review showed less interest than the Teachers College Record in this alteration in teachers' view of themselves and their work, waiting until 1967 to acknowledge teacher unionism. In a book review, Joseph Cronin warned that teacher unionism might not bring the educational improvements its proponents claimed. "Should negotiations simply rearrange the balance of power between those who manage a bureaucracy and those who staff it, the prospects for broader educational reform may be dampened by still another formalized set of constraints" he warned.[7] His apprehension may have been shared by the Review's editors and explain why they delayed five years after the Teachers College Record to broach the topic of teachers' new identity as unionists. George Counts countered Cronin's caution with a ringing defense of the new development and concluded that at last "The time has arrived for placing the role of the teacher in historical perspective."[8] But an examination of the History of Education Quarterly over the next decade reveals that if Counts' statement is taken as a confirmation of fact rather than a plea, he was very much mistaken. Not for seven more years, when panels in the history of education at the 1974 convention of the American Educational Research Association took up women's

experience in educational history and teacher unionism, would teachers be formally discussed by historians of education; even then the discourse was episodic. In Wayne Urban's 1976 examination of teacher organization and educational reform in the Progressive era he remarked on teachers' absence: "One topic that has been largely neglected in the 'renaissance' of educational history in the past two decades is the teacher".[9]

The omission was regularly noted but not corrected. In a 1977 History of Education Quarterly exchange on Schooling in Capitalist America, Joseph Featherstone wondered at how "two Marxists have managed to write a full-scale study of American education that manages to omit the workers in the schools- the teachers."[10] In his 1978 essay review of The Culture and Politics of American Teachers, Arthur G. Powell again reminded historians that "The history of teachers has remained a neglected subject." Nor had the "recent flowering of urban school history done much to change the invisibility of teachers" he noted.[11] Finally, in 1984, seventeen years after George Counts had proclaimed teachers' rightful place in the history of education, a photo of Margaret Haley graced the cover of History of Education Quarterly, along with Marvin Lazerson's essay review of two historical studies of teacher unionism.[12]

Why did historians of education, who were borrowing the tools of other social sciences, neglect a topic their colleagues in sociology and political science were mining so richly? To start, in the late 1950s and early 1960s under the intellectual

leadership of Bernard Bailyn and Lawrence Cremin, they were occupied with defining and relocating the discipline, placing the history of education in departments of history, where it would be defined broadly as cultural transmission across the generations, rather than in schools of education where its purpose was to educate teachers about schooling's institutional advances.

Cremin argued that history of education as practiced in schools of education had become a barren paean to progress, although he acknowledged that once real historians "raised the right questions, even the previous generation of historians of education could write fairly broadly and dispassionately" on them.[13] Defending the "educationists," that is, historians of education who were in schools of education, Robert E. Mason acknowledged that their involvement in teacher preparation programs had indeed shaped their perspective on the history of education, as well was their view of the appropriate academic affiliation for the discipline. However, Mason countered, the educationists' view of schooling was no more shaped by their affiliation with teacher preparation than was the critique of Cremin and the "new historians" he represented influenced by the Ford Foundation, which had funded Education and American History, the report which criticized the educationists. The educationists were no more interested or disinterested in advancing a particular point of view than scholars "subsidized by the Ford Foundation," he wrote, because "the professional scholar cannot really escape being 'interested'."[14]

By the late 1970's the educationists had ceded their hegemony, at least institutionally. One half of the disserations in the history of education from 1970 to 1980 on teachers' professional organizations were Ph.D.'s and the other Ed.D.'s.[15] David Tyack affirmed that "new historians" had "discovered a richly varied terrain, previously neglected" which teachers would benefit from studying.[16] It was, however, a landscape that was for the most part barren of insight or information about teachers themselves, except for Tyack's own study on urban schooling, The One Best System, which in discussing the texture of existence in school examined the lives of those who inhabit them.[17]

History of Education Quarterly had indeed broadened its interests, as evidenced by a December 1964 review of Philippe Aries' Centuries of Childhood: A social History of Family Life, but this more expansive view did not include teachers. The 1972 bibliography for historians of education listed one citation about teachers, a selection in Vermont History, "A Teacher and Her Students: My mother Ellen Peck and Her One-Room Schoolhouse in East Montpelier," a piece not so different from the kind of article the "new historians" had excoriated the educationists for writing, not so different from the 1958 History of Education Quarterly piece, "Uncle Charlie's Teaching Days," an oral history of rural school teaching.[18]

By the beginning of the 1970's, the "new historians" were themselves challenged by "revisionists" on the nature of school reform and the purposes of school reformers, but the revisionists

duplicated the "new historians'" omission of teachers, for different reasons. The revisionists, who grounded their historical critiques in a social vision informed by radical, New Left politics, certainly could not be accused, like their predecessors, of the "supercilious disdain of unionism which so many of us in education...carry as the baggage of the genteel but politically disenfranchised."[19] The revisionists' disdain for teachers' lives and their organizations had other roots.

The revisionist historians examined the relationship between school systems and society, sharing an analytic framework with other radical social scientists, like Bowles and Gintis. Both groups based their work on the view of schooling and school life of radical critics of education in the 1960s, or "romantic" critics as Diane Ravitch describes them. The "romantics" differed in the type of indictment they made of public education, but they shared a concern that "schools destroyed the souls of children, whether black or white, middle-class or poor" and advocated a pedagogy based on the ideas in A.S. Neill's Summerhill.[20] For the most part, the "romantics" explicitly rejected the possibility of reforming public schools, and radical social scientists began where the "romantics" left off, trying to understand and effect institutional change. Revisionist historians attempted to provide components which the "romantics" ignored in their "ahistorical" and "atheoretical" movement, two characteristics which Lawrence Cremin noted limited the ability of this renascent progressive education movement to go from

protest to reform, but in examining schooling historically, the revisionists relied on the "romantic" perception of teachers.[21]

"Romantics" like Herb Kohl and Jonathan Kozol were influential and widely quoted, and their work exemplified the New Left's disdain for public schools and its teachers. The "romantics" had little interest in working with any teachers to improve the school, except those who were radical like themselves, an atttitude shared - or learned- in graduate schools of education. As one angry teacher educator observed in 1971, a "worldview not currently popular" in graduate schools of education is that "schools are worth reforming- that there are students, and teachers, in them who need fresh ideas and challenges to traditional ways." [22] Ravitch places publication of Johnathan Kozol's Death at an Early Age and Herbert Kohl's 36 Children at the apex of the "romantic" criticism of public education, and an examination of Kozol and Kolh's writing reveals how their perception of teachers subsequently framed revisionists histories.[23]

Johnathan Kozol's narrative of his work in a mainly black elementary school describes how only he of all the teachers truly cared for the students. Death at an Early Age reverberates with Kozol's contempt for the career teachers and his lack of interest in understanding the institutional obstacles they faced in sustaining idealism they, like he, may have initially brought to their jobs.[24] After four months of teaching, Kozol felt experienced enough to tell the reading teacher she was a racist,

yet he was confused and crestfallen when he was fired and no teachers, not even his "friend" the reading teacher, rose to support him. The lives and concerns of the teachers, probably older females, were invisible or offensively conservative to Kozol. Kohl, who taught in New York City school as its teachers launched teacher unionism's rebirth, dropped out of union activity after the 1961 strike, right at the point that most of the school staff joined the union, because their presence deprived the radicals of control.[25] In an earlier work Kohl advises new teachers against talking to other teachers about one's ideas, warning that one should be polite and silent at faculty meetings.[26]

Ironically, as Kohl's mention of his brief union experience reveals, the "romantic" view of teachers, unmovable as individuals and non-existent as a collectivity, developed just as teacher unionism was beginning its spectacular growth in the middle and late 1960's, with teachers in urban areas especially, challenging the political status quo within school systems. In her 1967 review of two magazines, one produced by the AFT, the other by "romantic" or "New Left" critics of schooling, Maxine Greene argued that the publications exemplified the polarization of the progressive movement in education between "romantics" and unionists. She faulted the AFT publication for fusing a "front office" sensibility to its "unexceptionable" aims, while rebuking the editors of the romantic periodical for their boastful refusal to discuss alternative social arrangements that would allow

teachers to take up the values the "romantics" espoused. "These two magazines are strangely dichotomous. In being dichotomous, they are disturbingly exemplary," she wrote, but "The time may yet come when we can overcome the either/or."[27]

Teachers and their organizations had no possible connection to educational reform - or any progressive change for that matter - for the "romantic" critics, most radical social scientists, and revisionist historians, who only reproduced the anti-union attitudes of the American student or New Left of the late 1960's. When Marvin Garson, a prominent leader of the New Left declared "I'd walk through a picket line of plumbers" he expressed the anti-union sentiment of a generation of radicals who saw unions as intractable defenders of an oppressive status quo. This in part explains the curious failure of Bowles and Gintis to discuss teachers, as Joseph Featherstone noted. Schooling in Capitalist America took up workers and class but never mentioned unions, in the workplace or in the political system. Their program for educational reform gives neither teachers nor unions in general any particular role in social change. Unions simply join "schools, the media, and government" as bodies in which revolutionaries need to be "conquering positions of strength."[28]

Not everyone with roots in the New Left ignored teachers and their organizations: some radical reformers turned the Marxist orientation of using unions' stability and institutional resources on its head. They contended that teacher unions were reform's natural opponent. As David K. Cohen wrote, teacher

unions could never be allied with progressive reform for they "not only lobby for their economic interest but they also use public institutions and influence over the licensing function to control certification, training, and quality standards for the enterprise." [29]

The momentous collision over community control in New York City schools in 1968 and 1969 probably alienated the New Left even more from teachers and teacher unionism because of its overriding identification with the civil rights movement, but even before the dramatic events in New York City, the proponents of educational reform were split between those who hailed teachers as "heroes and heroines of endurance" and commended "their great union," and education's "romantic" and radical critics who saw little value in either.[30]

Against this political backdrop it is easier to understand the abstract quality for which much revisionist history has been faulted, especially the work of Michael Katz.[31] Some writers attributed the abstraction to the use of social class in a deterministic manner, while other more sympathetic social historians have identified the shortcoming as a failure to explore resistance to social control, as well as its triumph.[32] However, few observers connected the abstraction to the invisibility of schooling's actors, the teachers and students who populate the institutions. Only quite recently have historians begun to ask how economic pressures, schooling's structural changes, and pedagogical or social attitudes actually altered

teachers and students' lives in schools, as for instance Larry Cuban has done for the latter factors.[33]

Though the work of revisionist historians was faulted as distorting history through an imposition of modern political concerns, more traditional critics also ignored teachers lives and organizations. For example, Diane Ravitch's political history of educational conflict in New York City public schools covered 150 years with no analysis of teachers or their role in school politics until the 1968 collision between the United Federation of Teachers and advocates of decentralization.[34]

Ultimately, teachers as a subject of historical investigation were discovered at the crossroads of labor and women's history, but not before both perspectives were well-established. Winter 1970 Labor History critically reviewed a historical study of the New York City Teachers Union, written by a well-known leader of its Communist faction, but interest in the book probably stemmed from the author's (and labor historians') ideological concerns more than regard for teachers as unionists since the annual bibliography indexed articles on "socialism" and "communism" but not education.[35] In 1973, in its fourteenth year of publication, Labor History contained its first discussion of teacher unionism as a labor development.[36] Why were Tampa's immigrant tobacco workers at the turn of the century, a history of the American Civil Liberties Union, and a book on modern African trade unions of interest to labor historians while teachers were not?[37] Teachers had, after all, participated in

over 500 strikes during the decade that these articles and book reviews appeared.[38]

One reason was women's invisibility throughout the 1960's in Labor History: "women" as a bibliographic category was introduced simultaneously with "education" in the Winter 1971 issue of Labor History. However, another part of the explanation is what David Tyack identified as the "animus against the lower-middle class teacher," a prejudice which was prevalent in the work of feminist historians as well.[39] As Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Nancy Tomes explained, "because the nineteenth-century woman professional existed somewhere between the exploited female industrial laborer and the nonproductive bourgeoise [sic] lady, she has been relegated to the periphery of research and writing in the field of women's history."[40]

Brumberg and Tomes note that absence of scholarship about the history of female professions "may well reflect the ambivalence of women historians about the meaning and consequences of professionalism in their own personal lives."[41] As a "minor profession" teaching exacerbates that ambivalence and as woman's "true" profession, teaching creates even more uncomfortable conflicts for feminists. For one, "women teach and men manage," which is not an ideal model of women's participation in the labor force, at least not for proponents of sexual equality.[42] For another, many of teaching's responsibilities are inescapably nurturing, which makes them also ineluctably female according to the existing division of labor.[43] An occupation

which is "female" in nature heightens the tension in feminism between the desire for equality and assertion of difference, a problem Ruth Milkman has discussed.[44] One early feminist analysis of women's social roles rejected the "compassion trap" which accounted for the concentration of educated women in the "so-called helping professions," where they perform the "nurturing and protective functions...the housekeeping tasks on behalf of society at large."[45]

The dichotomous class biases of feminist historians, both as proponents of women's rising class status and as defenders of female industrial workers, are clear in feminist writings about history of education. One study, a history of women in America dedicated to "the women who taught us and the women we teach" contains no essay about women teachers, either in the section on education or the segment on women workers. The women workers scrutinized are a Colonial business woman, nineteenth century collar laundry workers, Chinese prostitutes in California, and hospital workers. The history of women in education is defined as the education women received, not gave. In one essay Rosalind Rosenberg quotes a professor at the University of Chicago who opposed women's use of undergraduate courses as a substitute for normal school preparation for teaching careers, but implications of this use of higher education for teacher preparation escape the author's attention.[46]

With the exception of the Tyack and Strober article noted earlier, Signs had no article on teachers before 1984, although

there were three articles on history of education describing women's lives as students and five entries on "factory work."[47] In 1975 Alice Kessler-Harris analyzed the AFL's atttitudes and experience in organizing women workers from 1885- to 1925 and didn't mention teachers, explaining that "women worked at traditionally hard to organize unskilled jobs" like garment workers or domestics.[48] However, a dissertation in history of education written one year after the Kessler-Harris article noted that in 1903 an AFL convention urged central labor bodies to assist in organizing the nation's 430,000 teachers, and Butte, Oklahoma City, Scranton, and Gary, cities with strong socialist traditions, all had teacher groups affiliated with the AFL in 1915. In reply to a query from the American Political Science Association about the advisability of unions for teachers, Gompers replied "We are glad to commend the teacher union principle to teachers, for we know it leads to liberty."[49]

Through 1986 Feminist Studies had still not discussed teachers' lives, though Volume 5, number 2 featured a female coal miner on the cover. In History of Education Quarterly throughout the 1970's, feminist historians focused on women's experience in education as college students or school administrators.[50] An irony unnoticed by a group of authors who detailed the achievements of feminist historiography, using education "as an example of a field in which the primary direction of feminist scholarship has been to look at how an institution- in this case, the schools- shapes women's lives," was that their work was

bereft of analysis of how women themselves have shaped the schools in which they have worked.[51]

In their work on teachers and teacher organizations, Julia Wrigley, and Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir have perhaps most successfully synthesized the political, economic, and social history that is needed to deal with class, gender, and culture in the history of education.[52] As Douglas Sloan argued historians must, they have preserved "a sense of the actors in the situation and the ways they work and are worked upon by the institutional stricture in any given circumstance."[53] However there are indications that their historiographic contribution may be ignored when the history of educational reform in the 1960's is begun.

Maxine Greene noted over twentyfive years ago that quality educational reform could not be achieved without the values which the "romantic" critics advocated, but would also be elusive "if teachers do not assert themselves as dignified human beings who can afford to respect the children in their classrooms because they have learned to respect themselves."[54] The historic presence of teachers and their organizations is a critically important topic of investigation, both for "presentist" concerns about contemporary educational reform and for a thorough understanding of what was and what might have been in the history of education.

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2. Lorraine McDonnell, "The Control of Political Change Within an Interest Group: The Case of the National Education Association," (Ph.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1975).

3. Phi Delta Kappan 43 (1961), 2-8 and 118-124.

4. Editor's note, Teachers College Record 66 (October 1964), 7.

5.Editor's note, Teachers College Record 66 (February 1965), 453.

6.Dissertation Abstracts 25 p.73, 26 p.124, 27 p. 139, 28 p.165, 29 p.154-155 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1964-65,1965-66, 1966-67, 1967-68, 1968-69).

7.Joseph Cronin, review of Collective Negotiations for Teachers by Myron Lieberman and Michael H. Moskow, Teachers College Record 37 (Winter 1967), 157.

8. George Counts, review of Teachers and Unions by Michael H. Moskow, Teachers College Record 37 (Winter 1967), 150.

9.Wayne Urban, "Organized Teachers and History of Education Quarterly," 17 (Spring 1976), 35-42. Panels for Division F, History and Historiography of Education, 1974 AERA convention announcement in History of Education Quarterly 13 (Winter 1973). Robert L. Reid was scheduled to discuss "Organizing the Teachers: Women Activists in the Progressive Era" in a panel on "Women in American Education: A Historical Perspective," with David Tyack as the panel discussant. An entire panel on "Organized Labor, Teachers Unions, and American Education" had been organized with David Selden, AFT president, as discussant.

10.Joseph Featherstone, essay review of Schooling in Capitalist America by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in History of Education Quarterly 17 (Spring 1977), 149.

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21.Lawrence A. Cremin, "The Free School Movement - A Perspective," Today's Education 63 (September 1974), 72.

22.Faith Weinstein Dunne, review of Don't Smile Unitl Christmas by Kevin Ryan in Harvard Educational Review 41 (August 1971), 408.

23.Ravtich, The Troubled Crusade, 236.

24.Johnathan Kozol, Death at an Early Age (Boston: Houghton MIfflin, 1967)

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27.Maxine Greene, review of Changing Education and This Magazine Is about Schools. Harvard Educational Review 37 (Fall 1967), 675.

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29.David Cohen, "Reforming School Politics," Harvard Educational Review 48 (November 1978), 432.

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50.Patricia A. Palmieri, "Here Was Fellowship: A Social Portrait of Academic Women at Wellesley College, 1895-1925,: History of Education Quarterly 23 (Summer1983), 195-214. Anne Firor Scott, "The Ever Widening Circle: The Diffusion of Feminist Values from the Troy Female Seminary 1822-1872," History of Education Quarterly 19 (Spring 1979), 3-26.

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